

Resolution supporting the Craggy Mountain Wilderness and National Scenic Area

This resolution will support the permanent protection of 16,000 of old-growth forests, waterfalls, scenic views, trout streams, and trail networks less than 15 miles from downtown Asheville. The protected area will include:

- *An expanded and federally designated 8,693-acre Craggy Mountain Wilderness protecting 4,000 acres of old growth and 44 rare and endangered species;*
- *A 16,000-acre National Scenic Area protecting the hiking, biking, and equestrian trail networks, waterfalls, clean drinking water, recreational opportunities, and panoramic vistas and viewsheds from Craggy Gardens, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the Mountains to Sea Trail.*

The Craggy-Big Ivy section of Pisgah National Forest is one of the wildest and most scenic forests in the East, and it's less than 15 miles from downtown Asheville. Over the past five years, Craggy-Big Ivy has received overwhelming public, scientific, and political support for permanent protection.

The U.S. Forest Service has recommended in its draft forest plan to expand the Craggy Wilderness Study Area and to protect nearly all of the Craggy-Big Ivy area as a Special Interest Area. We applaud the Forest Service for recognizing the rare and special natural heritage of the Craggies and for recommending stronger protections for this area.

A coalition of 100 organizations—led by Forest Keeper, I Heart Pisgah, Friends of Big Ivy, and Southern Environmental Law Center—are working with the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources to introduce a Congressional bill that would expand the Forest Service recommendations and permanently protect the entire Craggy-Big Ivy forest as the Craggy Mountain Wilderness and National Scenic Area.

The Craggy Mountain Wilderness and National Scenic Area will double the size of the core Wilderness Study Area and protect the entire Craggy-Big Ivy section as a National Scenic Area. The Craggy Mountain Wilderness would be the first and only wilderness in Buncombe County, and the National Scenic Area will be a cornerstone of tourism and regional economic growth.

The Craggy Mountain Wilderness and National Scenic Area will permanently protect the panoramic viewsheds from Craggy Gardens, the most popular and most photographed spot along the entire Blue Ridge Parkway. It also will protect one of the largest old-growth forests in the East, home to over 44 rare and endangered species. Its pristine headwaters are home to native trout and part of the protected watershed of the Ivy River, an important tributary of the French Broad and the drinking water source for the city of Weaverville and Mars Hill. Craggy-Big Ivy is also adjacent to the Asheville Watershed and Woodfin Watershed.

The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program has identified significant portions of the Craggy Mountain Wilderness and National Scenic Area for highest priority protection, and Craggy-Big Ivy has been highlighted by The Nature Conservancy as one of the most important core forests in the Southern Blue Ridge.

The proposal has widespread public support. The Craggy Mountain Wilderness and National Scenic Area is endorsed by a broad and diverse coalition of over 100 organizations, dozens of Buncombe County businesses, and thousands of local supporters. The Forest Service received over 6,000 comments supporting permanent protections for Craggy-Big Ivy—more than any other area in the Pisgah-Nantahala National Forest. In 2016 and 2017, the Buncombe County Commissioners and Asheville City Council passed unanimous bipartisan resolutions supporting the complete Craggy Mountain Wilderness, with hundreds of supporters attending both meetings.

The Craggy Wilderness and National Scenic Area also has strong local support. Over 300 members of the Big Ivy community—many wearing “Don’t Cut Big Ivy” t-shirts and hats—packed a meeting with the Forest Service to express overwhelming support for permanently protecting the Craggy-Big Ivy forest. Mountain families have used Big Ivy to hunt, fish, hike, camp, and swim for nearly two centuries. The Craggy Mountain Wilderness and National Scenic Area will safeguard traditional local uses of the land, including hunting, fishing, and horseback riding.

All existing roads and trails will remain open to all current uses in the Craggy Mountain Wilderness and National Scenic Area. Craggy has become a world-class mountain biking destination, and all mountain bike trails—including the 20-mile trail network from Laurel Gap to Corner Rock—will remain open to mountain bikes.

Our coalition hopes that Buncombe County will consider passing a resolution reaffirming its support for the Craggy Wilderness and National Scenic Area during the U.S. Forest Service’s official public comment period (February 14 – May 15, 2020).